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Criminal Justice Research Solicitation:

Empirical Issues in Performance Measurement

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U.S. Department of Justice

National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

September, 1981

Dear Colleague:

The National Institute of Justice is pleased to announce the expansion of its program of support for research on performance measurement issues in criminal justice agencies. A decade of research on criminal justice agency management and operations has left many important issues yet to be resolved. Managers face declining budgets and a pressing need for factual information about the efficacy of various resource tradeoff options. Public frustration over crime and the criminal justice process must be alleviated by an improved understanding of the system's limitations in producing behavioral changes. These pressures are superimposed upon the basic requirement to provide efficient and responsive government.

Obviously, this very broad program charter defines a correspondingly broad field of research interests. It is our expectation that sustained progress on these issues can only be made through a program that offers support for a range of projects over the spectrum of theoretical and applied research and that encourages the diversity of insights afforded by a variety of disciplinary approaches.

We hope that you will find this announcement of interest. I would also appreciate your bringing it to the attention of any of your colleagues whom we may have missed in this mailing.

Sincerely,

Harry M Bratt

Harry M. Bratt
Acting Director

PROGRAM SOLICITATION FOR

RESEARCH IN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Institute's interest in the field of Performance Measurement stems from a desire to promote rationality in criminal justice management and expenditure, and a belief that performance measurement can play a significant role in the accomplishment of these goals. Performance measures should ultimately contribute to judgements on issues like: "Did the agency recognize and remedy deficiencies in its services?", "Did it adapt its activities as changes occurred in its social and legislative environment?", and "Was it able to reduce service costs without adverse impact on its consumers?" It should also provide the bases for managerial decisions regarding the deployment of personnel, the kinds of services provided, and day-to-day operational policies.

Performance measurement systems having these capabilities are beyond the current state-of-the-art, not because of limitations in our abilities to process information, but because of a limited research base on key performance issues. Conceptual frameworks for creating and assessing performance information are relatively underdeveloped. Key performance dimensions like equity and responsiveness are difficult to operationalize, and the technical relationships between levels of services provided and the levels and kinds of activities conducted are not clearly understood.

Concern over these and related issues has led the Institute to initiate a program directed toward improving conceptualization and assessing the empirical evidence on performance in the criminal justice system. We hope to acquire through this program findings on what kinds of measures are needed, how policies and resources interact, and eventually, how to compare the "payoffs" from different activities.

BACKGROUND

The National Institute of Justice began its Performance Measurement Program in 1978 because it felt that prevailing systems development practices had not produced satisfactory performance information for operational agencies. Performance definitions were restrictive. They emphasized the efficiency and effectiveness aspects of performance in a field where equity and service quality are of persistent interest. Performance definitions were also value-laden in the sense that they presumed that all (say, police) agencies had the identical objectives, and operated in environments that posed common problems. Other performance-oriented terms were largely undefined. Programs to reduce court delay, for instance, had no uniform operational definition of delay. Offender recidivism suffered from an over-

abundance of definitions, which were largely based on convenience in data collection rather than conceptual models of offender behavior. In many cases performance measures were proposed that had intuitive appeal (e.g., recidivism and crime rates), yet left to the reader the development of the causal model that would link agency activities to these outcomes.

These deficiencies in measurement selection are not symptoms of careless investigations, but rather represent the serious lack of research findings on what criminal justice agencies produce and how their technologies work. It is unclear, for instance, whether there is any way to achieve marked increases in arrest rates or reductions in times-to-trial except through increases in agency resources. The levels of resource increases required to improve service quality or agency responsiveness to complaints are also unknown. That is, the relationships between agency resources, service delivery technologies, and various dimensions of agency performance are inadequately specified in theory or tested in empirical work to form a credible basis for generalizations about behavior of the criminal justice "industry."

Rather than fund a series of potentially interesting but seemingly unrelated studies on performance measurement, the Institute decided to commission first the development of theoretical frameworks for performance measurement in criminal justice. Five grants were awarded in FY 78 to synthesize available literature and to develop conceptual frameworks which would suggest how research might proceed profitably.[1] Four of the grants were functionally-oriented in that they emphasized performance issues as they applied to policing, prosecution and defense, the courts, and adult corrections, while a fifth grant studied measurement issues that appeared to be relevant to every agency.

Grantees used a variety of methods to develop their syntheses and conceptual frameworks -- literature reviews, analyses of extant data, surveys, and field interviews with practitioners. They produced under these grants different conceptual frameworks and agendas for research based upon their research and their professional experiences.[2] Some authors adopted a "measurement

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[1] The grantees were the University of North Carolina (Police); Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc. (Prosecution and Public Defense); Research Triangle Institute (Courts); The Osprey Company (Adult Corrections); and the Georgia Institute of Technology (Measurement Issues).

[2] Final reports on the syntheses are being prepared for printing. Xerox copies of some of the reports (Police, Prosecution, Courts, Corrections) are available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service at a cost of $5.00 per report. See last page for order information.

for internal management" perspective, for instance, while others pursued a public accountability model. Some opted for a goals-objectives framework whereas others felt that goals and objectives were artificial constructs. This diversity among frameworks reinforced our belief that sponsoring the design of general performance measurement systems for local agencies would be premature.

The synthesis studies previously funded identified broad classes of issues which appear to warrant Institute research support. These are described further under Program Scope. The strategy adopted in this program is to sponsor research within that scope which will bring empirical evidence to bear upon a variety of performance issues. That evidence will eventually be used to foster the development of empirically-grounded practitioner systems.

PROGRAM SCOPE

The purpose of this program is to support studies in performance measurement issues which will ultimately improve productivity in criminal justice agencies and promote constructive dialogue about performance between agency managers and their oversight bodies and interested constituencies. The research should in general be empirically-grounded and contribute to the development of some perspective on performance measurement. Researchers may choose to ground their work in any sector of the criminal justice system -- police, prosecution, public defense, courts, or corrections -- or to conduct research which requires an inter-agency framework. They are reminded, however, that the topic will be judged on the basis of its contribution to performance measurement and not solely on its possible operational importance to the sector of emphasis.

The focal point of this program is the performance of criminal justice agencies or the criminal justice system. Research on personnel performance measurement or on largely civil justice components of agencies is discouraged. A study's programmatic merit will be evaluated on its ability to contribute generalizable findings on some performance concept or issue that is not currently well-understood. Studies that seek primarily to enhance the precision of existing statistics or to improve existing information processing procedures are also discouraged.

Grantees currently conducting studies under the program[3] have found it useful to separate the scope of the program into three broad classes of studies: Defining Performance, Understanding Agency Technologies, and Developing Causal

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[3] FY78 grantees were awarded continuation grants in FY80 to conduct empirical research on issues that were derived from the syntheses and conceptualizations produced. These research topics are described briefly in the appendix.

Linkages. While recognizing that all studies proposed are not likely to fit conveniently under a single theme, we have retained these titles for expositional convenience. Researchers submitting projects for consideration need not label their proposals under any particular theme.

The research topic Defining Performance encompasses those issues which pertain to the oversight of an agency's services. Central questions are who evaluates agency services and by what rationales, whether agencies operate under articulated or informal definitions of performance, and what sources of information (e.g., statistics, media, informal communications) most influence performance assessments by oversight and interest groups. Appropriate studies might include the development of methodologies to elicit performance criteria from agency managements, from oversight groups, and from interested constituencies. Other investigators might wish to determine the kinds of performance statistics that these information consumers perceive to be most relevant in reaching their performance assessments. Related studies might investigate how agencies receive and provide performance information. Other research on this theme might include the development of measures of performance concepts and attributes (e.g., responsiveness, compliance, discretion) and the development of multi-dimensional evaluation schemes to determine the information content of both single performance measures and groups of measures.

The topic Understanding Agency Technologies encompasses issues pertaining to the identification and production of agency outputs. Many agency outputs are considered to be intangible and are often confused with outcomes. This program defines outputs as products controllable by agency policies and resources and outcomes as results influenced by the agency and some other factor (another agency or society). Research is encouraged that will better define and measure aggregate agency products and the technologies which produce them.

Research questions relating to the production of agency services or outputs are likely to be productivity-oriented in that they involve establishing the relationships between resources used and products delivered. Thus, research on combinations of physical inputs and organizational policies which appear to maximize agency outputs or minimize costs would be of interest to the program. Researchers are encouraged to distinguish between technical efficiency -- producing maximum outputs with given resource combinations -- and allocative efficiency -- determining which resource allocations maximize outputs for a given budget and resource costs.

Productivity is used here in a broad sense. Products often have multiple attributes or qualitative differences. Gains in efficiency, for example, might sometimes require reductions in apparent equity and vice versa. Researchers are encouraged to develop concepts which capture and measure such qualitative

differences and output tradeoffs. They might also consider how overall agency productivity might be measured.

The topic Developing Causal Linkages refers to the specification and empirical testing of the relationships between agency activities, outputs, and social outcomes. Eventually services must be tested to determine whether they have achieved a social impact. Rigorous testing, which discards competing explanations and identifies unintended consequences, requires the articulation of the theoretical causal chains by which agencies influence outcomes and of the processes by which other factors intervene to reduce the agency's impact from one of certainty to one of lesser likelihood. Basically, studies in this area would examine the steps by which outputs progress to outcomes and estimate the resource commitments necessary to significantly improve the likelihood of desirable outcomes.

The issues raised above are not prioritized nor are they meant to represent the universe of legitimate topics that will be considered for funding under this program. The National Institute of Justice is willing to consider any research topic which, if successful, will increase our understanding of performance measurement as it pertains to the objective assessment of the services provided by criminal justice agencies. Studies suggested are illustrative of legitimate topics and of possible sizes of efforts.

Final budget allocations for the Institute's FY82 programs have not been established; however, support for this program has been tentatively set between $500,000 and $1,000,000. Individual awards are not constrained except by the program's budget. Researchers are expected to submit bounded problem statements and resource requests consistent with the methodologies and amounts of original data collection proposed. Proposals seeking larger levels of funding will naturally need to demonstrate greater programmatic value and possibly lower research risk.

REVIEW PROCESS AND AWARD CRITERIA

Interested researchers are invited to submit proposals in accordance with the instructions in the next section of this solicitation. Proposals received will be reviewed by a joint panel of Institute staff and experienced researchers from outside the agency. Proposals will be rated according to the following criteria:

Significance of the Proposed Contribution
If the research were successful, in what way and to what extent would it contribute to our understanding of performance measurement in criminal justice environments?

Methodological Rigor
Is the proposed approach technically sound? Are terms used adequately defined and operationally meaningful for the

study proposed? Are the limits of the study carefully established?

Management Plan
Does the sequence of activities proposed appear to be consistent with the study's objectives? Do resources appear to be appropriate for the tasks involved? Is the project period reasonable? Have assurances been acquired, where necessary, that relevant criminal justice organizations will cooperate with the research effort?

Costs
Are personnel, travel, data collection, and other support costs reasonable for the proposed study? Has an effort been made to procure economically whatever contractual services are needed? Is the overall budget consistent with the management plan?

HOW TO APPLY

Eight (8) copies of fully executed proposals should be sent to:

Performance Measurement Program
Office of Research and Evaluation Methods
National Institute of Justice
633 Indiana Avenue N.W.
Washington D.C. 20531

A proposal consists of the following:

* A completed and signed Federal Assistance Application on Standard Form 424 and OJARS Form 4000/1.
* A budget narrative.
* A program narrative.

The program narrative is the technical description of the work to be undertaken. It is primarily on the basis of the information presented in this part of the proposal that the review panel arrives at its funding recommendations. Applicants should be careful to ensure that this section contains clear and reasonably complete descriptions of a) the research question being addressed; b) the significance of this work to the overall development of performance measurement theory; c) the methodology, research design and general plan for conduct of the work; and d) the kind of products anticipated from the research (books, journal articles, monographs, etc.).

As attachments to the program narrative, applicants are required to furnish a project abstract of not more than 200 words, a short (1 page) schedule of the planned sequence of project activities, and professional resumes of key project personnel.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION SCHEDULE

Proposal review and funding are planned in fiscal 1982. In order to be eligible for funding, eight copies of the program narrative section of the proposal must be postmarked no later than January 15, 1981. Although we would encourage submission of complete proposals by that date, applicants will be given until February 10 to send in the required eight copies of SF 424, OJARS 4000/1 and the budget narrative.

FURTHER INFORMATION

In order to obtain copies of the required application forms or to get further information about the program or the application process, researchers should write to Edwin W. Zedlewski, Program Manager, Perfomance Measurement Program, at the above address. Mr. Zedlewski can be reached by phone at (202) 724-8265. Applicants who have a research idea but are uncertain of its appropriateness for funding under this program are encouraged to call Mr. Zedlewski and discuss the idea with him before undertaking the considerable amount of effort required to plan their project in detail and write up a proposal that would be competitive.

APPENDIX: ON-GOING RESEARCH IN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Impact of Police on Perceptions of Crime Threat. Citizen estimates of likelihood of victimization are linked to patrol capacity, police visibility, and organizational factors. Perceptions are controlled for prior victimizations and police contacts, plus personal and neighborhood characteristics.

Measuring Police Outputs: Calming Distressed Citizens. The ability of police to calm citizens during encounters is measured as a function of on-scene circumstances, citizen actions, and citizen characteristics. This ability is analyzed with respect to patrol response capacity and calming techniques employed.

Measuring Police Outputs: Obtaining Suspect Information. An analysis of the effects of patrol levels and deployment strategies on the amount of suspect identification information obtained from victims and witnesses during citizen-initiated requests for help.

Determinants of Prosecutorial and Defender Workloads. An analysis of the case attributes determining the manhours required to bring cases to final disposition. Factors considered are offense seriousness, defendant's criminal history, and the case's legal-evidentiary complexity.

Effects of Information on Case Outcomes. Cases which contain inadequate, excessive, or irrelevant information are presented to prosecutors and public defenders in order to determine how information quality affects screening decisions.

Improving Information Effectiveness. Managers are often inundated by statistics from performance measurement systems. This project tests ability to absorb and synthesize information under laboratory conditions. Issues addressed are information overload, sequential decisions, and redundant information.

Reality Testing of Performance Measures. Researchers' judgments of the theoretical soundness of performance measures may lead them to select different measures than decision-makers would choose on the basis of operational relevance. Criminal justice managers are asked to assess alternative sets of system-wide performance indicators in their jurisdiction for comprehension and relevance for operational decisions.

Reliability Testing of Performance Measures. Robust performance statistics should provide consistent interpretations of performance over a wide range of system workloads and structures. This study simulates alternative criminal justice systems and evaluates the ability of alternative performance measures to describe operating conditions.

Measuring Efficiency in Multi-Output Agencies: State Courts. Multiple indicators of court outputs are collected for

approximately 100 state courts and analyzed with respect to resource utilization. Courts will be rated on utilization efficiency across all outputs. Ratings will be validated against those given by experienced court administrators.

Developing Performance Benchmarks in Corrections. Since performance is a relative concept, some basis of comparison must be specified. Several potential benchmarks will be assessed: national standards, stated goals, other correctional agencies, own performance over time, and expected performance as derived from mathematical models.

Identifying Key Ageny Functions. Even though an agency may perform a large number of tasks, it may be feasible to adequately assess its performance by carefully measuring a few central functions. Probation and parole operations will be studied in order to identify which functions have the strongest impacts upon their performance definitions.

Model-Based Performance Measures. Correctional agencies operate under a variety of service models or normative goals. Measures of performance consistent with various service objectives will be specified and tested for adequacy against constituent groups with differing performance expectations.

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Rockville, MD 20850
ATTN: Performance Measurement Solicitation

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